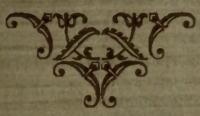
Songs to Men and Nature



G. A. LEICHLITER

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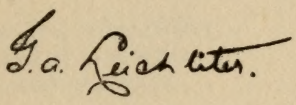
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INSCRIPTION

THESE are not perfect songs. The singer realizes that quite as fully as any who may chance to see or hear them. But they are his songs and that may be the only possible reason for his daring thus to send them forth upon a formal mission.

These songs were first presented by the singer to a gathering of the most generous and genial people, namely, those of Toronto and of College Street Baptist Church. By them they were received with kindliness and commendation better than they deserved and to them, the best of friends, they are affectionately dedicated.



SONG THE FIRST

THIS is a song to Nature! Nature at one of the loveliest times of the year and in one of the loveliest places on earth—autumn in the hills of Pennsylvania. They are noble hills. When unscarred by hateful progress they stand as if bowed in prayer. When autumn comes in the hills the trees run riot! They are prodigal beyond description in their employment of color. This is a song to those hills before the winter comes.

THE PARTY IN THE HILLS

I SAW a great and gaudy party
Staged within the Castle of the Hills.
The hosts of guests lingered
In countless groups as far as I could see.
How richly dressed they were!
And in the Castle, where they met,
No tongue could rightly tell
The care and labor there bestowed.

The Maple family came in latest golden-brown
And red, and proudly spread
The news that unto them had come
New garments rich and rare,
Because so grandly they could wear the glory.
One, only, of the family dared to come
In full green summer dress,
And found the frown of all the gaily clad
To be upon her.
But she cared little for that rude rebuke;
She loved that green and glorious garb
And meant to keep it while she could.

The Oaks arrived along the drive
Up to The Castle Hill.
Sombre and stately they were;
Not much enamored of the brilliant dress
Of other revelling guests.
Their pride was in virility and strength
And handsome form.
They loved too, the rightful claim
Of longer residence within the land
Than any others of the motley host.
They were proud, those Oaks,
But had a right to be.

The Sumachs came, and how the murmurs
Spread among the party guests.
They were all dressed in red,
And wore upon their breasts
Black plumes.

As they trouped in the whole crowd
Turned their heads.
It was a gorgeous sight,
And proved again that brilliancy
Need never fear for loss
Of admiration.

One old Sycamore appeared.
What wretched contrast!
I could not understand why he
Should come among that charming group
And clad the way he was.
An old, old suit,
Not either grey or white,
And tattered, too;
With epaulets and braid of rusty brown,
And on his breast were little spiney bangles.

It was a strange attire,
And filled me with a wish
That I might take him to one side
And tell him plainly that his dress
Was too inferior for that host.
But then that would not do,
And so I turned me from his wretched poverty
To brighter scenes.

There came a rustle in The Castle of the Hills,
And I heard voices sweet and soft,
With here and there a trace
Of glorious melody.
The Pines had come,
All dressed in velvet,
Rich and green and seeming soft.
The Oaks that boasted of their forms
Now looked with envy.
Tall, straight and supple
Are these Pines,
Their lovely arms outstretched to heaven
As if in supplication,
Reveal the lines of beauty
Seen in very, very few
Among the Party in the Hills.

As they came in one said to me:
"They are the richest family in the hills, those Pines;
You can tell it in their dress!
I've never seen so much as one
Of all that host,
To wear a faded frock."
I too, soon judged that they were richly dressed,
Those true nobility
Among the gathering in The Hills.

There were many, many others there,
Just common folk, full dressed
As best they could afford,
But not attracting any great attention.

I saw the decorated halls,
Within the Castle of the Hills.
Mostly Asters there—
Little purple Asters of the fall,
Rich purple like the glory of a full ripe grape.
They nodded and smiled!
They were only little servants,
But I thought, quite as sweet and smart
As any of the guests of great renown,
Or long, long habitation in the land.

I did appreciate the Party in the Hills,
For Autumn smiled on all.

SONG THE SECOND

BUT men sometimes inspire songs. This is a song to a man. He came discouraged. Maybe he had a right to be discouraged. Maybe no one ever has a right so to be. Discouragement is a thief and a robber. He demands the surrender of man's treasures. Man may refuse if rightly armed. The weapon is character-strength. This is a song of strength.

BE STRONG

"BE strong
And bear the burden of thy care
Without complaint.
Choice life it is
That falters not
When shadows of Gethsemane
Fall o'er the way,
The portent of a night of pain.
Yet, of a night that quivers
With a joy
Beyond the common, easy,
Stimulating sense
Born in the knowledge
Of triumphant flesh.
Be strong!
No road that leads on faithfully
To God can offer ease
And ease alone.
Some men must bleed,
And some, perchance, must die!
Is not the consciousness
Of faith and favor
With our God, enough?
One star there is
That ceases not to shine!
Hope lights the way
And o'er the path its ray
Of brightness ever casts a light
Both beautiful and bright.
Be strong and follow on!
The pathway leadeth home."

SONG THE THIRD

I SING a song of a River and the Tide. It is a little River and most of the time creeps along toward the Sea between low slimy banks. It is a seeming sad river though uncomplaining. But when the Tide comes in from the far off Ocean it is a great River. The Tide comes in a formidable wall of water and covers all it touches. Then the valley smiles and every little gully is filled to overflowing. I sing the song of the River and the Tide. Together they make a happy valley.*

*Suggested by A. T. W., Moncton, N.B.

THE FUNDY TIDE

THE tide runs in
O'er Fundy's troubled heart,
Urged on by ocean depths beyond.

Murmuring it comes!
Murmuring against a slothful stream
That all day long
Has crept a sea-ward way
Between low-lying, slimy banks.

Urging it comes!
A water-wall, white-capped
And full and swift,
As if to say,
"I'll wash this valley with my flood."

Against all shores it sweeps
And soon the man-made, shore-bound
Bridgings are submerged.
Where all day long
A sickly, cringing river
Crept a feeble way,
A flood runs in.
The Fundy Tide, the Fundy Tide,
God's gift to little streams.

SONG THE FOURTH

THIS is a song to a flower. It is a very little flower and very shy, but richly fragrant. Often it grows in wide communities of sweetness. And if you crush it by your heavy, awkward treading it is but the sweeter. Crushing releases the perfume of many a life. I sing you a song to a little, retiring flower growing in the woodland, often never to be seen, but ever blooming, sweetly.

ARBUTUS

"SHE peeps beneath
The last bank of the snow.
She seems to know
That earth yet needs
The beauty of her face,
And fragrance of her heart
To make more tolerable the way.
Frail thing is she.
Through long, drear winter days,
She bides the time,
'Till in the broad, sweet woodland ways
The warm sun shines,
And bids her lift her veil
To show her sweet, frail
Charming face, again.
Her breath is sweeter far
Than gentle breeze, oft wafted home
From deep, blue southern seas.
And now I know her name!
Arbutus."

SONG THE FIFTH

DARE we sing a song to trees—two trees alone of their kind in lovely New Brunswick hills? Though alone, not seeming lonely. Their lovely whiteness was a benediction upon all the other families of the trees. These Birches stood so still. The singer could not pass without a song of two trees.

WHITE BIRCHES

"TWO birches stand like virgins
With faces heavenward turned,
And arms outspread
As if imploring worthy benediction
Upon unblemished life.
So white and straight they are.
How like an uncorrupted soul,
A faithful, upright mind.
How like the life
Untouched by sinister desire,
Or an ambition undisturbed
By fires of fierce, uncharitable greed.
White, tall and straight,
Crowned by every rising sun
And kissed by each
Descending shade,
These holy virgins of the verdant hills."

SONG THE SIXTH

A SONG now, of a bird. He was a little fellow and very common. His song was neither sweet nor melodious, but it was *his*. Having that little song he used the little thing greatly. The whole community could hear him and many of them did not congratulate him much. Some other birds can sing more sweetly but none more constantly or lustily. This is a song to a bird that rejoices in that he has and not once complains.

HE EVER SINGS

"HE'S singing now outside
My window in the sun.
Nor is his task an easy one,
For many times he came
With bits of straw to make that nest,
A home for his own little ones.
And times again a gust of wind
Caught his wee bit of grass
And whisked it down to earth.
Did he complain?
No, he just dropped to earth again
And found the treasure lost,
And set to work with added zeal,
Singing right on with sturdy will
To do his best.
Birds have no time to quarrel, complain
And idle time away!
They have their homes to build
And songs to sing while it is day.
Forget this not, dear child of men,
You'll happier be to sing
And not complain."

SONG THE SEVENTH

WHY should not we sing to Winter? White winter and cold. Fleecy coverlets everywhere. Grasses and flowers and streams asleep and Mother Nature on guard. Soilures of the way all covered by spotless purity. The fields at rest. The trees holding up the harp-strings for the wind. The sky, the stars, the moon—that Pale Lady of the Night—cold and chaste. Days passing, men waiting. Why should not we sing a song to Winter? Here it is!

WINTER

GREY, barren hills,
That rise against a leaden sky,
And biting winds that will not die
Until they sweep aside
Each evidence of tender life
That clothed the earth.

The silver stream
That leaped and laughed and sang
In sun and shade,
Now stilled;
Struck dumb and lifeless,
Not a rill
Betokening its earlier charm.

And now a deep and flaky coverlet of white
Spread o'er the silent, barren fields.
Beneath receding sun
And chaste, cold moon
It does not yield its place.
Not 'till it sees its course full run
Will it withdraw its icy hand,
For this is Winter.

SONG THE EIGHTH

WHEN fields are abloom we have no choice—we must sing. These are the wide, sweet daisy fields of north Texas. Daisies everywhere—a perfect wilderness of bloom. But men nowhere. Miles on miles we've gone and not a sight or sign of men. But flowers everywhere and yet everywhere. Blooming, dying blooming. And now our hearts inquire—is not it best to bloom if bloom we must and die without the sight of men? Men add no beauty to a bloom, no fragrance to a flower life.

RED FIELDS

RED fields, what martyr shed his blood
To mix thy crimson stain?
What mighty army died upon thy breast?
How came you thus to show to all who pass
Thy bloody heart?

Nay, nay, not blood,
But bloom!
Each face that gives thee
Vision of a bloody field,
A flower face.

Come near! Look on us where we stand!
We bloom upon these wastes
And ask no price
Save the sheer joy
Of living out life's best,
No matter where the place.

Dissuade us not! Our life is here,
And here we bloom and die—
Our mission met when once we bloom.

SONG THE NINTH

ANOTHER man came. His face was lined, his heart was troubled. The days had not been kind to him. The past was full of things he hoped would never come and the present was unprofitable. But the future was his great and trying difficulty. What would it bring? If past and present were indications he would seek to evade the future. What would he do? This is his song and the song of any who suffer his life tragedy.

THE FUTURE

THE future's bright!
The gloom we've seen has largely been
A weakness of our faith
To try the tasks we found
About us every day.
All men would fail accomplishments
Of noble build,
Did they but see that which is dark
And difficult to do.

In years now dead,
Our fathers toiled in spite
Of trials deep and dark,
And built a land, the pride of time!
Will we, to-day, faint at the tasks at hand?
Not so! With courage for the toil
And faith in God,
We'll make this good land
Glow, and grow in strength.
The future's bright! Toil on!
That ere the night,
Your task be done.

SONG THE TENTH

THIS is a song of Kentucky's hills. Lovely, lovely Kentucky where hearts are true and love is warm and radiant. The Hills of Kentucky seem always to reveal the happy hearts that there abound. If green and purple with tall cedars and little berries or touched by the Artist of the Fall those hills still tell the story of stout, faithful hearts.

TREES

"THE woods are beautiful!
The dying blaze of summer
Leaves a trace of gold upon the trees.
Now and then a bush full red,
As if immersed in blood,
The mark of sacrifice,
Weeps by the way,
Her day of glory past.
Ere long those lovely forms
Shall stand lone, gaunt and grey,
While wailing winds
Both sob and sigh thru each new day.
What if they seem to die,
Those trees that thru the long,
Sweet summer hours
Have blessed the earth with shade?
'Tis but transition!
Leaves fade and fall,
But life remains!
It passeth not with that
Which only is the dropping of a robe.
They shall be clothed again,
Again in beauty wake
The shout of joy,
And bless the ways of men.
These trees shall bloom anew,
Be clothed in green,
And yield the fruit of purpose.
They shall not die!
The inward urge keeps life alight!
What could be lovelier,
More wonderful than trees?"

SONG THE ELEVENTH

THIS is a song to the sea and to me—and to you if you like. I have sent many vessels out a-voyaging and so have you. We have expected all of them to come home again with the richest of burdens. By the shore—the lovely changing shore—we wait, looking long for the far-off sails white in the morning light. But many of our little ships came not home again. One did come again. This is a song to the one returning ship.

MY SHIPS AT SEA

MY Ships of Life have sailed to sea;
I dream they will come back to me
Laden with stores of fruit and grain and gold.

First went my "Hope," a sturdy craft,
Built, as I thought, to weather any gale
That ever whipped the rolling main
Into an angry foam.
But storms try hard the ships that sail the wave,
And "Hope's" poor heart was pierced
By hidden foe in league with storm.
So my "Hope" died upon the sea;
Nor gale, nor wave e'er brought her back to me.

My little ship named "Love" lifted her sail
And like a white-winged Dove of Peace
She slipped away to sea.
How wonderful she'd been to me
As by her pier she rode at ease
Through the long days and longer nights,
Until the call, mysterious, came,
And, hurriedly, her anchors weighed,
She followed on through nights and days,
In search of treasures worthy of her gain.

I waited long for "Love" to come again,
And dreamed that all her decks would be
Piled high with gain.
Surely no storm nor stress
Could thrust her down beneath the wave
And have her die at sea!
But "Love" ne'er came; she, too, was lost to me.

Then "Faith," her sails all proudly set,
Swept out to ports afar.
Fierce storms broke from above and all about her
Dangers cast their nets of fear.
Yet "Faith" knew but one thing:
"To gather spoils and then sail proudly home."
"Faith" faced the storm, nor cared
What blasts of fury rent her sail.
Straight by the Polar Star she steered her course,
Knowing that failure lurked in other ways.
In ports beyond she gathered stores of gold
And precious wares and piled her decks
Until, unable to contain the more,
Homeward she came with all.
Thus did she foil the storm, this little craft,
Brought all her precious wares safe through the sea;
But best of all, "Faith" has come back to me.

SONG THE TWELFTH

THIS is a song of the sky, the world and men. Somehow they are alike. They all have horizons, and purposes lie within each of them. This is a song of the early, very early, morning. It begins long before the light and it ends only with the dark. Or, really not then, for the song then becomes the nursery melody of nature while her children sleep upon her arm. After the dark it is a quiet song, but still a song of the sky and the world and men.

AT DAWN

THE East's alive!
The night, in fear, hath folded her black tents
away,
And fled adown the pathway of the world.
In silhouette against the quickening sky
Tall poplar trees like sentinels stand
As if to challenge each poor pilgrim of the way
By what inalienable right
He sought to leave the portals of the night
For the conquests of the day.

Yon hamlet sleeps.
No moving life, no faintly flickering light,
Yet marks the deep desire
Of those who dwell in peace and quietude,
To take their place in life's wide enterprise
And share the burdens of the way.

But nature is astir!
In yonder meadow's heart
A lark in flute-like notes
Gives praise because the new day opes;
And far away a robin carols
His rich, ringing tones,
That leap from out his throat
And catch the swift wings of the wind.
They tarry not, but carry melody
O'er field and hill
So wonderful that song of his.

The East's alive!
Beyond that rim of sky that skirts the world,
The wonders move in multitudes.
Swift, unseen hands shift
All the light of coming day
Until the clouds that spread like curtains grey
Before the wide face of the world,
Are changed to burnished gold.
Eternal powers, unseen by men,
Lift up the red rim of the sun
As if from out the world's hot heart.

Emblazoned is the way!
The sky is gold!
Golden the streams that once
Were dull and blackish things.
The grasses now are treasure chests;
The wind-blown rose holds in her heart
A spark of that celestial fire
Found only in a drop of dew
Touched full by morning light.

The world's alive!
The eye that closed when darkness
Fell from off the wing of night
Sees now how many majesties
Have come from out the deep
Of heaven's heart.
Men are astir!
The roads and lanes of time
Bear on the caravans of trade
To market-place where gain is made.
Beasts bow their necks to yokes
That draw the burdens of the day,
And men seek faithfully the way
That bringeth rich return.

O glorious day that lights the way
Of life to gracious venture,
Give strength afresh and courage
For the task that spreads before.
Nor let the dark forebodings of the night
That's gone, cause haunting fear.
Before us is the Day, the Day,
The glorious Day,
And from it we would learn the way
Of life and peace and plenitude,
And deathless cheer.

